

*Inclusus aut exclusus lector?* The reader's postures in Catullus

Catullus is well-known for addressing many of his poems to specific recipients mentioned by name or pseudonym, either to praise or deprecate them, thus opposing the Neoteric insiders to the crowd of unqualified outsiders. What are the relationships between such addressees and the general reader? The poems' publication implies the existence of more readers than the named addressees, but were the latter even supposed to be the poems' original readers?

J.-C. Juhle (2004) showed that addressing the admired writers Nepos, Calvus and Cinna on one hand, and the *pessimi poetae* Suffenus and Volusius on the other hand, enabled Catullus to define his poetic program and reflect on the relationship between writer and reader. Choosing one's target audience contributes largely to shaping the text. Yet, if poem 50 can indeed be considered to have first been written for Calvus, poem 36 was probably not written for Volusius but to ridicule his "shitty sheets" (36.1). Some named addressees seem to be excluded from Catullus's readership, in order for the happy few to laugh at them.

W. Fitzgerald (1995: 34-52) demonstrated that even poem 1, dedicating the book to Nepos, entrusts it to him only to finally "remove [it] from his grasp [in order to place it in] the care of the virgin Muse." By comparing poems 1, 15 and 16, Fitzgerald established how Catullus "manipulates the power relations between poet and reader": "the poet is all-powerful because he speaks for others who are not allowed to speak for themselves, but on the other hand he must entrust his words to others". In poem 15, Catullus entrusts his beloved Juventius to Aurelius although he fears the latter will "ruin" him just as, in poem 16, Catullus reproaches Aurelius and Furius for misinterpreting the poems he gave them. "In both cases, Catullus has made himself vulnerable by virtue of what he has entrusted to Furius and Aurelius; the

combination of entrusting and withholding in poem 15 recapitulates the giving and withholding that characterizes poem 1, but in a much more aggressive context” (Fitzgerald 1995: 38). Yet, what is the place of the reader in poem 16? Do they identify to Furius and Aurelius, addressed in the vocative, or do they side with Catullus and laugh at their poor reading skills? This crucially changes the reception of the poem since Catullus threatens to rape Furius and Aurelius in order to reassert his challenged masculinity. As the relationship between writer and reader is framed in terms of active or passive sexuality, what place does Catullus give to female readers? Scholars usually argue for a male “model reader”, to use Umberto Eco’s concept, yet Lesbia and other addressees are women, and Catullus explicitly describes a female reader in poem 95.

Ancient readers generally identified to the poetic “I” (Skinner 1993: 132), especially since silent reading was not a common practice: the reader would actually say “I” as they read a first-person poem. Thus, invective and satire could be enjoyed by siding with the author, at the addressee’s expense. However, what if Catullus was giving a public reading of his poems? Would the audience not feel addressed by the many verbs in the second person, often in the imperative?

Furthermore, love scenes frequently put the reader-spectator in the position of a voyeur or an eavesdropper: V. Pedrick (1986 and 1993) and W. Fitzgerald (1995: 53; 142) identify such instances in Catullus, for example in poems 5 and 7. The reader then identifies neither to the first or to the second person, but to the third person, as the third party that they are.

Lastly, what happens when the poet addresses himself by name, such as in poems 8, 50, 51, etc.? Does he become his own reader at the exclusion of others or, conversely, help the reader identify to him?

This paper will reassess the reader's postures in Catullus by considering the plurality of Catullan readers and their capacity to relate to first, second or third person speakers. A larger view of the readers' varied postures in the Catullan corpus will help trace the continuities between Neoterics and Augustans, thus defining more clearly Catullan poetics and especially its relation to elegy and satire.

### Bibliography

Fitzgerald, William. *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Julhe, Jean-Claude. *La critique littéraire chez Catulle et les Elégiaques augustéens : genèse et jeunesse de l'épigramme à Rome*. Louvain; Dudley, MA: Editions Peeters, 2004.

Pedrick, Victoria. "Qui Potis Est, Inquis? Audience Roles in Catullus." *Arethusa* 19, no. 2 (1986): 187–209.

Pedrick, Victoria. "The Abusive Address and the Audience in Catullan Poems." *Helios* 20, no. 2 (1993): 173–96.

Skinner, Marilyn. "'Ego Mulier': The Construction of Male Sexuality on Catullus." *Helios* 20, no. 2 (1993): 107.